



Comprehensive Symposium Report

An Emerging BRICS Vision for the Global South

15 October 2025 | 09:30 – 13:00 hours

IIC Seminar Hall 2 & 3, Kamladevi Block, India International Centre, New Delhi

Executive Summary

One year ahead of India’s 2026 BRICS chairmanship, CUTS International and Chintan Research Foundation jointly convened a high-level Track 1.5 symposium to articulate a forward-looking BRICS+ vision for the Global South. Against a backdrop of escalating protectionism exemplified by United States tariffs of up to 100% on BRICS exports and systemic disruptions in trade, finance, and technology, the event assembled diplomats, policymakers, academics, and thought leaders to translate rhetorical commitments into structural reforms.

Keynote speaker Shri Sudhakar Dalela, Secretary (Economic Relations), Ministry of External Affairs, framed India’s presidency as an opportunity to redefine BRICS through “Building Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability” (BRICS), with a people-centric “Humanity First” ethos. Discussions across two thematic sessions and an interactive way-forward segment underscored BRICS+’s demographic and economic heft, 49.5% of the global population, ~40% of GDP (PPP) as a platform for South-South convergence, monetary sovereignty, resource security, and technological autonomy.

The symposium rejected the “anti-West” narrative, positioning BRICS as a corrective mechanism for equitable global governance. Practical pathways emerged: national-currency trade expansion, NDB local-currency financing, critical minerals consortia, AI ethics frameworks, and trilateral DPI replication. Think-tanks were tasked with evidence-based inputs to shape India’s 2026 summit agenda. A joint CUTS-Chintan research paper will follow, proposing a “BRICS+ Roadmap 2030”.

Event Overview

Date & Venue: Wednesday, 15 October 2025, India International Centre, New Delhi

Organisers: CUTS International & Chintan Research Foundation

Format: Half-day symposium (registration/networking, welcome remarks, keynote, two thematic sessions, tea break, way-forward, followed by lunch)

Attendance: ~80 participants, including diplomats from BRICS embassies, MEA officials, think from think-tanks, industry representatives, academics, and media.

Contextual Significance: Timed precisely one year before India's BRICS Summit hosting, amid US tariff threats (50–100%), carbon border adjustments, and post-Kazan (2024) momentum on BRICS Pay and expansion to 11 members + 10 partners.

The event opened with networking over tea, fostering informal exchanges on India's draft chairmanship priorities. Pradeep S. Mehta (Secretary General, CUTS) and Shishir Priyadarshi (President, Chintan) delivered welcome remarks, emphasising think-tank roles in agenda-setting. Shri Sudhakar Dalela's keynote set the strategic tone, followed by interactive sessions moderated with live polling and Q&A. The way-forward segment, led by Rajeev Agrawal (Chintan) and Purushendra Singh (CUTS), synthesised recommendations into actionable clusters.

Detailed Session Summaries

Welcome Remarks

Pradeep S. Mehta highlighted BRICS' transformation since overtaking the G7 in PPP GDP (2018), now representing 40% global GDP and 49.5% population. He cautioned against short-termism, urging a 25-year horizon for cooperation in technology, finance, energy, and governance. Mehta positioned CUTS' global presence (7 countries, UN accreditation) as a bridge for multilateral solutions.

Shishir Priyadarshi shared insights from a recent US delegation dinner, revealing intense American scrutiny of BRICS agendas—particularly common currency fears. He proposed three think-tank focus areas: (1) indigenous technology ecosystems; (2) interoperable macro-financial policies; (3) governance convergence without full harmonisation. Priyadarshi committed Chintan to evidence-based papers and Chatham House dialogues with BRICS embassies.

Keynote Address: Sudhakar Dalela

Secretary Dalela outlined India’s 2026 chairmanship vision, quoting PM Modi’s Rio (July 2025) statement: “Redefine BRICS as Building Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, Sustainability”. Key pillars:

- **People-centric approach** (“Humanity First”) mirroring G20 inclusivity.
- **Reformed multilateralism**: UNSC expansion, IMF voice for EMDs, equitable WTO rules.
- **Climate justice**: ISA, CDRI, LiFE, Big Cat Alliance as coalition models.
- **Development partnerships**: Food/energy security, SDG financing via NDB.

Dalela invited think-tanks to connect BRICS academic forums and supply research on DPI, sustainable finance, and supply chains. He noted BRICS+’s 20-year evolution (2006–2026) and its role as a “strong voice of constructive change”.

Session I: Multilateral & Monetary Architecture

Dipanjana Roy Chowdhury framed BRICS within the “Asian Age”, urging sub-regional integration (Southeast Asia–West Asia–Africa). He highlighted US tariff threats as catalysts for intra-BRICS trade.

Sanjay Bhattacharya described BRICS as a “Gen Z grouping”—agile, consensus-driven, citizen-empowered. He advocated:

- Broader agenda-setting via sectoral working groups.
- BRICS as G7–G20 bridge.
- Consolidation of Voice of Global South summits.

Cedrick Crowley stressed pivoting from crisis response to proactive development:

- MDB reform for Southern priorities.
- Debt sustainability (currency depreciation risks).
- BRICS Pay + CBDC interoperability.
- AI governance with developmental focus.

Interactive Q&A:

- On US tariffs: No collective BRICS response; bilateral engagement preferred.
- On common currency: Apologetic tone shifted—perhaps time to explore seriously.

Session II: Resource Security & Technological Autonomy

Amitendu Palit focused on critical minerals and green hydrogen value chains, advocating joint extraction–processing ventures.

Dimash Syzdykov highlighted Kazakhstan's rare-earth reserves and interest in BRICS Grains Exchange.

Dammu Ravi delivered a tour de force:

- **Glue factor:** Economic sovereignty amid \$100 tn global debt (\$30 tn developing world).
- **Currency alternatives:** National-currency trade (India's 30 pacts), benchmarking indices, NDB local-currency lending; Petro-Yuan as practical model.
- **Resources:** BRICS controls oil, coal, 60% global arable land; scale Indian agri-entrepreneurship in Africa.
- **Energy:** Replicate India's 500 GW renewable model at <3 INR/unit.
- **Technology:** AI, quantum, DPI; trilateral cooperation (e.g., UPI with Gates Foundation).
- **Risks:** Digital divide; competition vs collaboration.

Floor Interventions:

- Bharat Singh (Amphigry): Currency depreciation barriers to African power investment.
 - Sujit Bhalla: BRICS originated as Goldman Sachs marketing; suggested India announce "last BRICS meeting" to pivot to like-minded aggregations.
 - Swasini Haider (The Hindu): BRICS response to Trump's 100% tariff threat.
 - Sanjay Kumar (JNU): Contingency if UNSC reform stalls.
 - Samar Verma (CUTS): What binds BRICS long-term—enemy, values, or interests?
-

Key Insights

The symposium revealed BRICS+ as wielding substantial economic and demographic influence, encompassing over 49 per cent of the world's population and approximately 40 per cent of global GDP in purchasing power parity terms, yet its intra-group trade remains underdeveloped, particularly in Africa where it stands at around 16 per cent, presenting untapped potential for deeper integration.

India's forthcoming 2026 chairmanship was positioned as a pivotal moment to embed the "BRICS" framework of resilience, innovation, cooperation, and sustainability, with think-tanks playing a crucial role in agenda formulation through the BRICS Think-Tank Council to ensure evidence-based contributions inform summit outcomes.

On monetary resilience, discussions moved beyond mere de-dollarisation to emphasise practical scaling of national-currency trade, with India already operating 30 such pacts, alongside expanding the New Development Bank's local-currency portfolio and piloting BRICS Pay with

central bank digital currency interoperability, while benchmarking indices were favoured over a singular common currency.

Resource security emerged as a core development lever, given BRICS control over vast oil, coal, and critical mineral reserves, plus 60 per cent of global arable land in Africa, calling for scaled Indian agri-entrepreneurship models and renewable energy replication at viable costs below 3 Indian rupees per unit.

Technological autonomy was framed with necessary guardrails, advocating AI ethics frameworks to balance innovation amid India-China mistrust, trilateral digital public infrastructure models, and quantum research and development consortia to secure digital sovereignty through data localisation.

External pressures, such as United States tariffs ranging from 50 to 100 per cent and carbon border taxes, were viewed as accelerants for intra-BRICS trade and complementary supply chains, compelling the grouping to enhance self-reliance.

Governance and institutional hurdles were acknowledged, including competition between members like India and China versus the imperative for collaboration, alongside governance deficits in partner nations that impede equitable benefit distribution.

Comprehensive Recommendations

To strengthen institutional mechanisms and agenda-setting, an India-led BRICS Think-Tank Council Working Group should be formed to deliver quarterly policy briefs, while expanding the BRICS Academic Forum to incorporate private sector and youth voices, thereby positioning BRICS as a bridge between the G7 and G20 through its eight overlapping members.

In the realm of monetary and financial architecture, BRICS Pay 2.0 ought to pursue interoperable central bank digital currency pilots, such as linking India's UPI with China's Digital Currency Electronic Payment and Russia's Mir systems, complemented by a New Development Bank local-currency bond facility targeting 30 per cent of its portfolio by 2028, a weighted BRICS benchmark currency index for trade valuation, and a sanctions resilience facility offering contingency credit lines for affected members.

For resource security and supply chains, a BRICS Critical Minerals Consortium is recommended to facilitate joint extraction, refining, and recycling, with India handling processing and Africa or Russia supplying raw materials, alongside establishing a BRICS Grains Exchange with futures and physical delivery hubs in India, Brazil, and Russia, a 5 billion US dollar New Development Bank fund for Indian agri-entrepreneurship across ten African nations under an Africa Agri-Tech

Corridor, and an India-Australia-South Africa green hydrogen value chain pilot encompassing electrolyzers, shipping, and ammonia production.

Technological autonomy requires a BRICS AI Governance Compact to establish an ethics code, safety institutes, and open-source models, a 1 billion US dollar quantum computing research and development fund over five years led by India, Russia, and China, a digital public infrastructure replication framework with trilateral templates like UPI, Brazil's Pix, and South Africa's PayShap, and a space resource consortium to develop standards for lunar and Martian mining.

Enhancing connectivity and trade facilitation involves creating a BRICS Trade Facilitation Platform for digital non-tariff barrier resolution and single-window customs, synergising the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor with the African Continental Free Trade Area to form an India-UAE-Africa economic corridor, and developing a maritime domain awareness network supported by a joint satellite constellation.

Finally, to counter protectionism, a BRICS Resilience Playbook should coordinate World Trade Organisation filings and maintain a retaliatory tariffs database, while a Carbon Border Adjustment Task Force formulates a unified negotiation stance on carbon border adjustment mechanisms.

Conclusion

The symposium marked a decisive shift from diagnosis to delivery in BRICS+ evolution. India's 2026 chairmanship emerges as a generational opportunity to institutionalise South-South cooperation, amplify Global South agency, and forge interoperable systems resilient to unilateral shocks.

CUTS International and Chintan Research Foundation commit to:

1. **Joint Research Paper** (December 2025) with "BRICS+ Roadmap 2030".
2. **Policy Brief Series** on interoperability, AI, green finance.
3. **Pilot Project Database** for trilateral ventures.
4. **Chatham House Dialogue Series** with BRICS embassies.

As Secretary Dalela concluded: "BRICS will continue to play an important role in shaping a more balanced and inclusive world order." The symposium's outputs provide the intellectual scaffolding for India to lead this transformation.